

The Easy Way to Lose Those Last Few Pounds

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Weight loss is tough. You have to count calories or fat grams or number of times during the week you actually enjoy what you put in your mouth. You have to go to the gym and sweat in front of dozens of hard bodies who look at you like you're some zoo creature who wandered in. That's what weight loss is about, right?

What if it wasn't hard? At least to take off that last 10-15 pounds after you've almost reached your ideal weight? What if all it took was making a contract with yourself not to eat after 7 P.M.?

On January 2, 2003, I turned on my television and watched The Oprah Show. Oprah's trainer, Bob Green was her guest that day and they were discussing his "Get With The Program" approach to weight loss and improved health. Many of the points they raised were things I knew by heart – eat a variety of foods, get plenty of exercise, etc. But about midway through the show, Oprah said the most important thing she had learned about weight loss, the thing that had helped her more than anything else was NOT TO EAT ANYTHING AFTER 7:30 P.M.! (not even a grape.)

Oprah and Bob explained that in the evening when you start to feel that gnawing, hungry feeling, it's a sign that your body is going into your fat stores. You can either feed that feeling by giving it food or you can say, "I'm going to let my body use my stored fat for food instead." This simple concept is all it took for me to make one simple change that dropped my unwanted weight quickly and easily.

My first thought upon hearing Oprah and Bob describe why not eating after 7:30 P.M. (the earlier the better) helps you lose weight was "I can do that!" This seemed like something I could commit to. I've always been pretty athletic and never really had a problem with my weight, but now that I'm over forty, I've noticed I put weight on more easily. In December 2002 I stepped on the scale at the gym and was mortified to see that I weighed 132 pounds. That may not seem like much weight to most people, but 132 pounds is exactly what I weighed right before I gave birth to my son twenty-one years ago. So to me, 132 pounds was enough weight for two people! So here it is two decades and a year later and I'm at my full-term pregnancy weight and I'm not pregnant!

That's why I wanted to lose weight. And it's why this simple approach seemed so perfect to me. Right then and there I made a contract with myself that from that day forward I was not going to eat after 7 P.M. (unless I was in a shipwreck and hadn't eaten for days when I finally landed on a desert island at 9 p.m. and my rescuers wanted to serve me dinner and dessert!). That's the only thing I changed. I did not count calories or measure food. And I ate whatever I wanted to all throughout the day.

The results? I lost 10 pounds in less than five weeks! That's over one-quarter pound a day of fat! I achieved my ideal weight with very little effort and without sacrificing the foods I like to eat during the day. In fact, I ate Chinese take-out and fast food lunches during this five week period! And I didn't have to walk around feeling like I was pregnant again!

Other Reasons Not Eating After 7 P.M. Makes Sense

I think there are other reasons not eating after 7 p.m. helps with weight loss. Let's face it, most of us who snack after dinnertime do so while watching television or reading, so we're not actually paying attention to what we put in our mouths. How many times have you opened a bag of chips and then been surprised to find them all gone in one sitting? And it is usually chips or cookies or something else unhealthy we snack on after 7. I don't know about you, but those evening cravings never sent me to the refrigerator for a handful of bean sprouts!

And besides helping you lose weight, not eating after 7 p.m. has other advantages too:

- You spend less money on food (let's face it chips and cookies are expensive!)
- You're less likely to have bad dreams caused by your stomach trying to digest that sausage and jalapeno pizza or that entire tray of brownies you scarfed down at midnight.
- No crumbs in bed so you sleep more comfortably!
- Since you don't have to wash down your evening snacks with lots of fluids, you probably won't have to get up as often during the night to visit the bathroom!
- You could spend the time you're not eating doing something good for you like lifting weights or doing yoga. You don't have to, but you could!

Committing to Not Eating After 7 P.M.

If you're used to snacking off and on during the evening hours, you may have to fight your mind (and your stomach!) to wean yourself of the habit. I've found that talking to myself really helps (although sometimes it does confuse people if they see me doing it!)

Here are three things you can say to help stay committed to your goal:

1. This is easy!

Think about all the things in life that are truly hard – delivering a baby, interviewing for a new job, keeping your kids from repeating your past mistakes... Compared to those things, not putting food in your mouth after dinner is a snap!

2. This is fun!

Okay, I know what you're thinking – eating is fun, not eating is at the very best boring! But not if you replace your late-night snacking with things you enjoy!

I really love Hula Hooping, and have started Hula Hooping with three hoops at a time. This is something I really loved to do when I was a kid and doing it now helps bring out the kid in me. Not to mention that a friend told me that the movement of the body while doing the Hula Hoop helps lengthen and strengthen the root Chakra, the grounding center of your body. So, it's like revving up your body engine so more life force can flow through. The big bonus is that I have lost two inches off of my waistline by Hula Hooping!

To make your experience fun, find something you love to do and schedule it in the evening. Depending upon the season or the part of the country you live in, you could go for after dinner walks or hikes, go swimming, dance class, play games with your family, etc. Think of the evening as the time to have fun rather than to put on weight!

3. I can do this!

We've already decided that not eating after 7 p.m. isn't really hard in the overall scheme of things. And you've done much harder things in your life, so obviously you can do this as well, right? Once you make it for a month or so, you probably won't even think about it any more (especially if you're spending your time having fun!)

Of course, if you sit there staring at the clock every evening and when 7 p.m. comes around, you give a defeated sigh and tell yourself, "Well, now I can't eat anything, darn it!" you're setting yourself up for failure. Chances are you'll decide there's no difference between 7 and 7:15, then 7:30... and finally you've given yourself 'til midnight to get your snacking in!

What really helped me was when those first pangs of hunger occurred repeating over and over “This is wonderful! My body is eating fat now!” I could visualize weight coming off my hips and thighs. I focused on the idea body I wanted to have and told myself I deserved to be my best, healthiest, and most beautiful self.

Answers to Your Questions About Not Eating After 7 P.M.

1. What if I don't keep a normal 9-5 schedule and usually don't go to bed until 3 A.M.?

Good question! The idea is that you should stop eating two to three hours before you go to bed. So if you go to bed at 3 A.M., stop eating by 1 A.M. or sooner.

2. If I want to eat later at night, can't I just go to bed later?

Sure you can, if you want to be overweight and sleepy the next morning. It's all a matter of your priorities!

3. I'm dating and most of the time that involves going out to dinner. What am I supposed to say when my date asks me out to dinner at 8 or 9 p.m.?

The way I see it is you have a few options. One, you can go ahead and have dinner, but you need to go to bed later too (and chances are you will if you're not getting out of the house until 9 p.m.!). Or, you can suggest something other than eating like dancing or a movie.

4. Sure, today they say you shouldn't eat after 7 P.M. But the way things go, probably next year, scientists will decide that you should eat everything after 7 P.M. because you burn more calories in your sleep! So why should I try this approach to weight loss now?

Because it's easy and it works! This isn't rocket science, you know... You know you don't burn off as many calories when you're sleeping unless you're a sleep-marathon-runner, so the chances that scientists will change their mind about this one are slim. And you will be too if you STOP EATING AFTER 7 P.M.

You can do it!